



**Ron C. Cross**

## MID YEAR REVIEW

*By Ron C. Cross, Board of Commission Chairman*

Even though it is the middle of the calendar year, the County's fiscal year is from July 1st to June 30th, and we have just passed another balanced budget with no millage rate increase. This statement has been made for the past eight years, and its significance cannot be over emphasized. However, your taxes might increase if you had an increase in your property value with this year's assessment which is true for most of the County. This is a sign of prosperity and keeps our quality of life enviable. Our departments have been most responsible and have stayed within their budget constraints. Our FY 2006-2007 is almost \$140 million.

The budget process takes almost six months as we review each line item and capital request. As the County grows, the needs and concerns of the community multiply. One of our greatest challenges is to meet these needs as cost-effectively as possible. For example, we opened our new library this spring, and the response to the facility has been overwhelmingly. The public has requested longer operating hours, and we budgeted the necessary funds to meet this request.

Over the past few months, we have had public meetings concerning needed projects within the County and our Capital Improvements Plan (CIP). The staff came up with a wishlist that totaled \$100 million, and the public response has provided some additional. Our trim budget does not have the funds to accomplish large capital projects, and we have relied on the SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) to provide the funding for projects such as the new library. Our SPLOST program is becoming more robust with the increase of commercial and retail entities in the County. However, there will not be enough SPLOST funds to finish our list of proposed SPLOST projects, not to mention \$100 million more.

The Board of Commission has been considering all types of funding to help with these urgently needed items which involve transportation, stormwater/water, recreation, and buildings. We are also analyzing the responses which we have received from the citizens concerning the CIP. In the near future, we will decide whether or not to put a bond referendum on the November ballot to fund projects costing approximately \$40 million. From the responses received so far, the greatest need as been identified as stormwater/water/sewer projects. Transportation, Buildings and Emergency Services, and Recreation are not far behind. With the rapidly increasing cost of materials and labor, immediate attention to these problems could save taxpayers millions of dollars.

Public safety is the primary responsibility of government, and last month a new Sheriff's Office substation was opened in the former State Farm building on the corner of North Belair Road and Ronald Reagan Drive. In addition, the Sheriff will initiate a new bike patrol for Mullins Crossing in July. The other half of the building will be the Emergency Operations Center, which should be complete this month. These facilities in the heart of the Evans Town Center demonstrate our efforts to being pro-active in all aspects of public safety. Remember, if you are traveling over the summer to enroll in the Sheriff's Office Housewatch Program at 706-541-2800.

Beginning July 1st, citizens will have 24/7 fire and rescue service in all the unincorporated portions of the County. Station #11 on White Road near Harlem and a new Station #16 on Ray Owens Road near Leah will join the other fully staffed 24/7 stations. All stations are staffed by the Martinez-Columbia Fire and Rescue Department which is under contract with the County. Improving fire protection services and eliminating the former fire subscription fee system has been a high priority of the County Commission.

As the weather gets hotter, the use of water in the County goes up from 10 million gallons a day to 28 million gallons a day. Our Water Utility has diligently planned for these increases, and we can continue to turn on the faucet without a second thought. Our water quality is outstanding, and we are recognized on the state and national level for our excellence.

The County has recently hired two new division directors – both professional engineers. Scott Herring is the director of Construction and Maintenance and comes to us from Florida and has a strong background in road construction. Miguel Valentin, Engineering Director, comes from the Atlanta area and has expertise in civil engineering and environmental issues. These two gentlemen are providing great leadership in their divisions which are responsible for design, construction, and maintenance of roads and the review and approval of all development plans.



## Summer Reading Program

The Columbia County Library's 2006 Vacation Reading Program began May 19th and continues through July 28th. The theme for the children's program this year is Once Upon a Time. The young adult (ages 13-17) theme is Xtreme Reading! Feedback from teachers indicates that participants in Vacation Reading Programs come back to school able to read better. Vacation Reading Programs can show that reading is a fun, volunteer activity, and, unlike the structured programs during the school year, students get to choose what they want to read and enjoy.

Participants read 20 books or 10 hours to complete the program and receive a certificate and special prizes. Pre-school children, special children, and adults who are not readers also receive credit for books read to them. Reading folders and rules can be picked up at the new Columbia County main library in Evans, Euchee Creek Library near Grovetown, or the Harlem Library in Harlem.

Reading folders must be returned to the libraries no later than closing time on Friday, July 28th.





## Magistrate Judge is a Real “Go To” Guy

Magistrate Court Judge Wade Padgett’s desire is that Magistrate Court promotes the efficient resolution of disputes. When he ran for election in 2004, he promised to have court in other places other than the Justice Center for civil cases to make the process more convenient for the citizens of the County. Since then, Judge Padgett was the first judge to hold court in the newly-renovated Appling Courthouse and has also held court in Grovetown’s City Hall.

### Wade Padgett

The civil jurisdiction of Magistrate Court includes dispossessory actions (i.e., evictions), garnishments, and general civil actions where the amount of the controversy does not exceed \$15,000. The types of cases which this Court generally hears are suits for money owed from one party to another, claims for damage to person or property, landlord/tenant disputes, writs of possession matters, and breach of contract cases. There are no jury trials in Magistrate Court.

In 2005, Judges Padgett and Christine heard over 3,018 civil and criminal cases and collected \$407,397 in fines, fees, and court costs.

## Cooling Centers

Several locations throughout the County are designated as “Cooling Centers” from June 1st through September 30th. Heat can kill by pushing the human body beyond its limits, and elderly people, young children, and those who are sick or overweight are more likely to become victims of extreme heat. Studies have shown that a significant rise in heat-related illnesses happens when excessive heat lasts more than two days. Spending at least two hours per day in air conditioning significantly cuts down on the number of heat-related illnesses.



Cooling Center Locations	Times & Days Available
<b>Bessie Thomas Community Center</b> 5913 Euclaw Creek Dr., Grovetown	8 AM – 5 PM, Monday – Friday 556-0308
<b>Patriot’s Park</b> 5445 Columbia Rd., Grovetown	9 AM – 9 PM (Mon-Thurs), 9 AM – 6 PM (Fri & Sat) 1 PM – 6 PM (Sunday) - 863-7523
<b>Wesley United Methodist Church</b> 825 N. Belair Rd., Evans	9 AM – 5 PM, Monday – Thursday 869-0888
<b>Eubanks Blanchard Community Center</b> 6868 Cobbham Rd., Appling	9 AM – 6 PM, Monday – Friday 309-9451
<b>Laurel &amp; Hardy Museum</b> 250 N. Louisville St., Harlem	9 AM – 5 PM (Mon-Fri), 10 AM – 4 PM (Sat) 1 PM – 4 PM (Sunday) - 556-0401

## Registration for Fall Recreation Programs

Registration will begin July 24th for the County’s youth football, cheerleading, soccer and baseball fall programs. Registration can be done at Patriots Park or by mail. Registration hours at Patriots Park on July 24th – August 12th are:

**Monday - Friday, July 24th – August 4th - 8 AM - 5 PM**  
**Monday - Friday, August 7th –11th - 8 AM - 7 PM**  
**Saturday, August 12th - 9 AM - 1 PM**

Registration fees are \$55 for the first child, \$50 for the second child, and \$40 for the third child. All registration forms must be postmarked by August 9th and must include a check or money order. Please make checks payable to C. C. R. D., P.O. Box 498, Evans, GA 30809. For more information, call 706-863-7523.

## Congratulations!



If you have been wisely using compost piles or landfill disposition to keep pet animal waste out of your nearby stream, then congratulations! Tell us what you did!

If you have wisely lined the edge of your backyard stream with buffer plants, berms, and swales to slow erosion and waste, then congratulations! Tell us what you did!

Invite us to see what you’re doing! Who are we? We are the Columbia County Drainage Basin Advisory Council—a volunteer group of citizens and technical experts concerned with protecting the water quality and overall health of the County’s drainage basins.

If you want our guidance, we’re here to help. For strategies to control the pollution of our County lands and streams, please contact us at 706-855-7246, e-mail us at [SWUCustomerService@columbiacountyga.gov](mailto:SWUCustomerService@columbiacountyga.gov), or drop us a line at P.O. Box 204660, Martinez, GA 30917.